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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTIAGO 000879

SIPDIS
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TAGS: PREL PGOV CI
SUBJECT: Chile's Quick Regional Review: UNASUR, Rio Group, Argentina

REF: SANTIAGO 871; STATE 103219; SANTIAGO 833

CLASSIFIED BY: Paul Simons, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B)

¶1. (C) Summary. Roberto Ibarra, the third-ranking Foreign Ministry official, told the Ambassador that UNASUR can play a constructive role in South America by focusing on concrete efforts, notably combating narcotrafficking. Chile will assume leadership of Rio Group in 2010 and will focus on incorporating Caribbean countries into the group. Chile and Argentina will soon sign an integration treaty formalizing their growing cooperation. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador met with Roberto Ibarra, Director General for Foreign Affairs (number 3 in the MFA), on October 13. After reviewing P5+1 talks with Iran (reftels a and b), Ibarra provided a quick overview of relations in the Western Hemisphere, updating his previous discussion with the Ambassador on September 3 (reftel c).

UNASUR

¶3. (C) Ibarra again built his discussion on the region around strengthening UNASUR. He reiterated that it is important for UNASUR to develop concrete areas of cooperation, singling out combating narcotrafficking as a particularly promising area. He said that in doing so, UNASUR could also respond to Colombian concerns that it is combating transnational crimes of terrorism and drug trafficking. Ibarra believes that UNASUR's South American Defense Council could help define a constructive agenda focused around security confidence building measures. This would work best if political leaders allow technical experts (at the Vice Ministerial level) establish the agenda, avoiding the polemics that hamper meetings at more senior levels. Chile would need to carefully guide Ecuador to achieve progress in both areas, Ibarra noted.

¶4. (C) Ibarra said that Chile has closely followed discussions between Ecuador and Colombia, and believes that there is a good chance that they could come to an understanding on their bilateral dispute. Detente between Colombia and Ecuador would lower tension in the region, which in turn would give more room for UNASUR to grow.

Rio Group

¶15. (C) Ibarra said that Chile will take over leadership of the Rio Group from Mexico in February. It will maintain that position for the next two years and will establish a special group in the MFA to manage the process. He suggested that one of Chile's challenges as head of the Rio Group is to find a mechanism to "slowly" incorporate the Caribbean countries into the Rio Group. He specifically noted that English speaking countries often see issues differently than Spanish speakers. Ibarra said that even as the Rio Group looks to expand, there is consensus that "nothing replaces the OAS."

¶16. (C) Ibarra added an additional element with the Rio Group is that it includes Cuba, and Chile will see how Cuba behaves. He noted that thus far Cuba has been cautious, which is normal given it has not participated in similar fora for a long time.

Argentina

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¶17. (C) Ibarra said that Chile and Argentina are close to finalizing a new integration treaty. Although the treaty does not include many new elements, it will simplify existing arrangements and reinforce ongoing confidence building measures between the two countries. (Almost as an aside, Ibarra added that he hopes Chile can also pursue confidence building measures with Peru.)

¶18. (C) Ibarra confirmed that Presidents Bachelet and Fernandez will meet the Pope on November 28, adding that it has been challenging organizing a joint visit.

Trilateral Cooperation

¶19. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the State Department and other USG agencies met with the Chilean Ambassador in Washington to discuss concrete ways that we could begin to implement trilateral cooperation, and that the United States proposed focusing on Paraguay and El Salvador. Ibarra replied that Chile sees very positive developments in both Paraguay and El Salvador, with pragmatic new presidents in both countries.
SIMONS